

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Imams Visit Dhaka Smiling Sun Clinics**

**Dhaka March 14, 2006:** One hundred religious leaders took part in an Imam Orientation session organized by The Asia Foundation and funded by USAID, which was held at the Dhaka Imam Training Academy on March 8-11 2006. Several USAID partner organizations participated in the workshop, including the NGO Service Delivery Program, which oversees the Smiling Sun network of clinics. In Bangladesh there are 317 Smiling Sun clinics, over 100 of which are in the Dhaka Division.

The Asia Foundation's Leadership Outreach Initiative (LOI) will provide over 3,000 imams with hands-on, practical exposure to the work of USAID partner organizations throughout Bangladesh in 2006. The Imam Orientation program strengthens the capacity of religious leaders, as persons of influence in Bangladeshi society, to enhance public understanding of and commitment to national development issues through engagement with USAID partner organizations in a variety of sectors. During the Dhaka training session, participating imams visited four Smiling Sun clinics, located in Tongi, Gazipur, Rampura and Shahjadpur. They met with clinic doctors, paramedics and counselors. The health services available at the clinics, including lab tests and pharmacy services, were explained to them. The imams were keen to learn about the health care network, and to convey messages about positive health-seeking behavior to members of their local communities. A series of leaflets, which include quotations from the Quran noting the importance of providing adequate health care for women and children, were distributed to the imams. The imams were very interested in the health care messages contained in the leaflets and indicated that they would share these messages with members of the communities in which they serve.

Smiling Sun clinics, which are managed by 33 local NGOs, represent USAID's largest program in Bangladesh. They work to enhance the quality of basic health care at



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the clinic and community levels for millions of Bangladeshi families. NSDP provides technical assistance and support to the NGO network.

The 317 permanent Smiling Sun clinics, 8,000 satellite clinics, and over 7,000 community health workers play a significant role in providing families with high-quality, low-cost reproductive health, maternal health, and child health care. Twenty million people live in areas served by Smiling Sun clinics. The clinics provide over 2 million services to clients each month. Over a million people visit Smiling Sun providers for family planning services each year, and over 200,000 pregnant women receive antenatal care. Over 80 percent of children living in urban areas served by Smiling Sun NGOs have received all their childhood immunizations and almost 70 percent in rural areas. Almost half of all children who live in the program's urban areas and almost a third who live in Smiling Sun rural catchment areas receive treatment for acute respiratory tract infections—one of the most significant causes of infant mortality in Bangladesh.

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